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Stepping into Other People's Shoes Proves to be a Difficult Task for High School Students: Assessing Historical Empathy through Simulation Exercise

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Abstract

In 2011, the Finnish National Board of Education assessed the learning outcomes of history with a study whose results raised doubts about the fulfilment of the goals of history education. This article seeks to expand awareness about Finnish adolescents' understanding of historical empathy. The study assessed twenty-two 16–17-year-old high school students' ability to understand predecessors' actions in particular historical situations. The study also examined how well a simulation exercise works as a tool of empathy teaching and evaluation. Students participated in the simulation and afterwards the students were interviewed. They also participated in a survey that measured their attitudes before and after the exercise and wrote an essay at the end of the course. The results of the study show that most of the high school students did not reach the goals set for history teaching. The weak performance of students is explained by the strong tradition of history teaching which has been continuing in Finnish schools despite the curriculum reform. Teaching still concentrates on passing a metanarrative on to students who have not yet enough experience of explaining historical events from a multiperspective point of view.

Keywords: historical empathy, teaching empathy, assessing empathy, history teaching

Empathy as a Goal of History Teaching

The focus of history teaching has moved to the teaching of historical thinking in many countries due to changes in the teaching traditions in the past few decades. These new teaching traditions have emphasized a more inquiry-based approach: the events of the past can be seen in a multiperspective way and students are instructed to focus on historical thinking instead of memorising detailed content knowledge. Investigation and the use of primary sources, cause and consequence analysis and understanding about change and continuity are primary concepts of historical thinking. The concept of historical empathy also belongs to the range of these historical thinking skills (see e.g. Levstik, 2008, p. 56).

There has been much discussion about the concept of historical empathy, how it should be defined and above all, how it should be taught (see e.g. Foster, 2001; Harris and Foreman-Peck, 2004; Körber, 1998, p. 134; Lee and Ashby 2001, p. 25; Shemilt, 1984). Research affiliated with the concept began in Britain but recently it has flourished especially in the United States and Canada (Brooks, 2011; Endacott, 2014; Endacott and Brooks, 2013; Nokes, 2013). On the one hand, some researchers think that teaching empathy helps students to explain and understand the past; on the other hand, it is a controversial issue because the nature of the concept can be easily misunderstood. Seixas, Gibson, and Ercikan (2015) use the term *perspective taking* because it does not have as strong an emotional connotation as historical empathy. Many researchers (e.g. Duquette, 2015; Huijgen *et al.*, 2014) feel, however, that the notion of historical perspective is a larger concept than historical empathy. Endacott and Brooks (2013) also separate the terms from each other.

The affective dimension to historical empathy divides researchers. According to van Emden (2002, p. 4), Bell (2009), Lee and Ashby (2001, p. 24) and Foster (2001, pp. 169–170), feelings do not belong within the sphere of empathy. Identifying with the feelings of historical actors is claimed to be impossible as a comment made by a First World War veteran about the reality TV series *The Trench* indicates. The series simulated the war, but, the veteran pointed out, the people participating in the series could not completely assume the place of real soldiers because they lacked the fear of death which was very real to those in the war; moreover, it would be impossible to fully empathize with the feelings of uncertainty and fear of a family waiting for letters on the home front (Bell, 2009).

On the other hand, Barton and Levstik (2004, p. 207), Davis Jr. (2001, p. 3), Harris and Foreman-Peck (2004) and Little (1983) consider feelings to be an aspect of empathy. The most recent studies strongly link affective dimensions to empathy (Brooks, 2011; Endacott, 2010; Endacott, 2014; Endacott and Brooks, 2013; Kohlmeier, 2006). According to Endacott (2010) giving reasons for the behaviour of past time actors is not enough if the aim is to really understand the acts of these people. How they felt is equally important, because feelings have a profound impact on human behaviour. The examination of feelings helps us to deepen our understanding of human behaviour. According to Endacott, it would be illogical to view the decisions of past actors with a different approach than we use with those who surround us today. He is convinced that students are able to identify the feelings of historical figures by contrasting them with the experiences in their own lives that made them feel the same way. Endacott highlights the results of his study where students were asked to become familiar with some prominent historical figures. Most students demonstrated affective empathic engagement when they were asked to make historical decisions by entering into the situation of these figures of the past. Most students were able to take advantage of their own personal experiences. At the same time, they were able to maintain a sufficient sense of otherness in order to keep their connection to historical figures as authentic as possible.

Historical empathy should be considered a dual-domain construct where the thoughts and the acts of the historical actor, connected with his or her affective situation, are the targets of examination. It should also be emphasized, however, that the meaning is not to teach students to accept the acts of predecessors. Most of all, historical empathy requires an understanding of the fact that historical actors do not share the same point of view as we do today. According to Lee and Shemilt (2011, p. 40), to explain empathy 'entails elucidation of connections between goals, beliefs and values so that we can see how a course of action was reasonable in its own terms'. It is not the intention to identify with the people or events of the past but to understand profoundly the motives and reasons behind those people and events.

Researchers have been quite unanimous about the fact that historical empathy is not possible without a sufficient amount of context knowledge (e.g. Endacott and Brooks, 2013; Foster, 2001, pp. 172–173; Davis Jr., 2001, pp. 5–7, Husbands and Pendry, 2000, p. 131; Lee and Ashby, 2001, p. 25; Low-Beer, 1989; McAleavy, 1998). It requires an ability to both interpret historical sources and use this knowledge to explain the choices and actions of people in the past. Thus, teachers have to be able to offer students enough background information so that an empathetic analysis is possible. Ashby and Lee (1987, pp. 81–82) have defined contextual historical empathy as the highest level. The individual on this level is able to analyse historical events in relation to larger contexts. He or she can differentiate between the historian and historical actors and their positions. He or she is also capable of making distinctions between what the historical actor knew and what we know now.

Classification Levels for Historical Empathy

In the following paragraphs, we will describe the students' historical empathy using Ashby and Lee's classification. Although the classification was introduced almost three decades ago, it still provides a functional way to classify students' empathy levels. Ashby and Lee classified students

into five different groups according to how well they managed historical empathy. According to Ashby and Lee, the stages of historical empathy from basic to advanced are:

- 1) The 'divi' past (Perceiving the past as dark and unknowable)
- 2) Generalized stereotypes (Using stereotypes to explain the past)
- 3) Everyday empathy
- 4) Restricted historical empathy
- 5) Contextual historical empathy

A person representing the lowermost level (The 'divi' past) is unable to rationally explain the acts of people from the past. Instead, from his or her angle of vision, historical figures have acted irrationally. 'That sort of thing we wouldn't be doing nowadays 'cos we're not that stupid nowadays,' as one interviewee stated in Ashby and Lee's interview (1987, p. 70). At the next level (Generalized stereotypes) the explanations of human behaviour are based on different kinds of stereotypical models. On the other hand, students at this level typically project their personal beliefs and prejudices directly onto the past: '...the difference [between Anglo-Saxons and modern men] is that everybody believed in God, where now, not many do' (Ashby & Lee, 1987, 74). Students at the third level (Everyday empathy) are aiming to explain the past rationally. Personal beliefs are, however, projected directly onto the past likewise at the previous level: '[The ordeals were used] to make it a bit harder on 'em ... so they wouldn't try and do it (the crime) but um, I still don't think, you know, trial by ordeal is very fair' (Ashby & Lee, 1987, p. 75). A student at level 4 (Restricted historical empathy) is trying to understand the behaviour of the past-time actors by taking account of the approaches, intentions and beliefs of the people who lived in the era: 'It's obvious that they were really good believers in God, because it says here you could ask to go to the ordeal' (Ashby & Lee, 1987, p. 80). A typical fault at this level, however, is that the historical context and the general background of the era are not sufficiently connected. The fifth stage, contextual historical empathy, represents the highest level of empathy possession in the classification. A student, who reaches level 5, is mostly capable of detaching modern perspectives from what predecessors could know: 'What I reckon right, is the [Anglo-Saxon] system was as fair as the, as the current culture would allow ... I mean they weren't dim, I mean they still had the same capability for intelligence' (Ashby & Lee, 1987, p. 84). At level 5, students can also place the phenomenon under investigation into a wider historical context.

Not everyone can reach the contextual level of historical empathy. Yet, the ability to empathize in ordinary life differs from person to person. There are also differences in the possession of historical context. Some possess history so that they can understand what a person at a certain time could know and what kind of beliefs could impact in his or her thoughts. In turn, others have deficiencies in their historical knowledge. There has been criticism towards placing historical empathy at the core of history teaching because many teachers find it hard to deal with theoretically. Critics of the concept have said that in the worst scenario teaching empathy banalizes history into a fairy tale-like imagination (see Harris and Foreman-Peck, 2004, pp. 104–105; Low-Beer, 1989).

Defenders think that historical empathy is an essential part of historical thinking and for that reason it should be among the goals of history teaching. This is also the situation in Finland, where historical empathy has been made one of the core objectives of teaching history both in basic education and in high schools. However, the textbooks and the surveys concerning student's historical knowledge imply that teachers neglect teaching it. Teachers' reservations about including historical empathy in their teaching, however, might be the result of a lack of proper teaching material rather than the difficulty of assimilating this concept. Even today, textbooks consist of a large amount of content knowledge rather than focusing into individual actors' perspectives and in Finland there are scarcely any simulation-like teaching materials which are suitable for teaching historical empathy.

In 2011, the Finnish National Board of Education assessed the learning outcomes of history with a study whose results raised doubts about the fulfilment of the goals of history education. This article seeks to expand awareness about Finnish high school students' understanding of historical empathy. We strove to learn whether students achieved the objectives of the curriculum concerning historical empathy. We also strived to find out how well a simulation exercise works as a tool of empathy teaching and evaluation.

Studying Historical Empathy among Finnish Students

In Finland, nine years of comprehensive basic schooling are compulsory for all 7- to 16-year-olds. History is taught at the primary level in grades 5–6 (10- to 12-year olds) and at lower-secondary level in grades 7–9 (13- to 16-year olds). High school is not compulsory in Finland and is not part of the Finnish comprehensive school system. Students must make formal applications to a high school of their choice if they wish to attend. Acceptance to high school in Finland is based on merit (grades) and motivation and applications can be turned down so that it resembles the application process for college or university in the USA.

In Finland, history teaching based on historical thinking and teaching skills did not become normative until the beginning of the 2000s. At that time, teaching historical empathy rose to a position higher than before. The common objective of comprehensive school primary level is that 'the pupils will know how to place themselves in the position of a person from the past: they will know how to explain why the people of different eras thought and acted in different ways'. The objectives for lower-secondary level speak of how 'the pupils will learn to explain the purposes and effects of human activity' (National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2004.) The objective for high school students is to 'be able to assess human activity in the past and examine historical phenomena both in terms of each specific period and from the present-day perspective' (National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools 2003).

In 2016, the new National Core Curriculum, which continues the tradition of teaching historical thinking, came into effect in Finland. Thus, teaching empathy will be among the core goals of teaching history in the future. In the light of collected research data, it seems that the teaching of historical thinking has not been put into practice in the way that the core curriculum expects. According to a study by the Finnish National Board of Education, done in 2011, 15–16-year-old adolescents who were in the final grade (9th) of their compulsory education succeeded particularly poorly in tasks that presumed adolescents' own thinking and making interpretations (Ouakrim-Soivio and Kuusela, 2012, p. 133). The most difficult task for the over 4700 adolescents (8% of the age group) that participated the study was a task that measured the management of historical empathy. One of the given reasons for this is the old tradition of history teaching: it seems that teachers committed to teaching in the great narrative tradition do not follow the spirit of the curriculum but carry on with a content-based approach to history teaching (Rantala, 2012, p. 203; see also Gullberg, 2010, p. 265).

At the end of the twentieth century, history teaching in Finland was based on going through multiple contents. For this reason it has taken time to change teaching traditions – including teaching historical empathy (cf. Counsell, 2011). For a long time, the focus of the teaching was on macro history and so ordinary people were not discussed as historical actors. Consequently, Finnish adolescents are used to explaining historical changes by means of structures rather than individual actors (Ahonen, 1997, p. A261). History textbooks also neglected these individual actors. The current and the forthcoming core curriculum of basic education have made historical empathy one of the final assessment criteria at the end of compulsory education. The question is, have these final phase students had enough practice in historical empathy in their studies. To find an answer to this question, we investigated the historical empathy learning experiences of students who have moved from compulsory education to high school. We also assessed their historical empathy. We used a simulation exercise as our tool of assessment.

Unlike Finland, Anglo-American countries have used simulations in history teaching for a long time (e.g. Pellegrino *et al.* 2012). Simulation exercises based on authentic situations have also been used to assess students' historical empathy. The ability to acquire empathy has been studied in the USA by William Stover and Deborah Cunningham. Stover studied students' conceptions of the Cold War with a simulation which handles the negotiation situation in the Cuban Missile Crisis. He measured students' conceptions before and after the simulation and noticed a change that occurred in their attitudes towards history (Stover, 2007, pp. 117–118).

It has been assumed that a good historical content knowledge facilitates empathizing but not even a solid possession of context guarantees that a student can empathize in a simulation in a way that is expected. Usually the rules and conventions of these simulation exercises are easy to adopt but a risk lies behind them if they are used as tools for teaching historical empathy. If a participant cannot push aside his or her modern attitudes, historical empathy changes into fairy tale imagination. Cunningham noted in her study that students could not always step outside their own values and attitudes but were more interested in their current emotions than the experiences of historical actors. Empathy turned into moralism because some students took the stance of judges of history (Cunningham, 2004, pp. 24–29). When designing our study, we were interested in seeing whether we would notice the same kind of thinking with Finnish adolescents that both Stover and Cunningham observed in their own studies.

We understood the convention of historical empathy in the same way as VanSledright (2011, p. 51): 'the capacity to understand the past on its own terms, as in to judge historical actors and their actions within the contexts of the lives they lived'. The difficulty in assessing students' historical empathy has been in finding suitable ways to measure it. In traditional exams, such as those set by the Finnish National Board of Education, the evaluation of students' abilities was based on a traditional pen and paper test. Students' task was to study the newspaper article which was based on the interview of a former German prisoner of war and present reasons why American soldiers treated the German prisoners badly at the end of the Second World War. In the test, an unconventional viewpoint was chosen to reveal the students' historical empathy. Only the most capable students were able to transcend the conventional picture of history that had been emphasized in the teaching, and to examine the issue from another perspective (Rantala, 2012). It is challenging, however, to assess how well someone adopts historical empathy by using that kind of a test. Besides students' abilities to step into other peoples' shoes, their knowledge of history also has to be taken into consideration (see Harris and Foreman-Peck, 2004). As VanSledright (2011, p. 51) has stated: 'To make a narrative case, that is, to make the story work, requires imagination to fill in blanks'. We assumed that the simulation would enable students to engage in a situation which would be more stimulating than traditional pen and paper tests, allowing the student to step into a historical figure's shoes and to fill in the missing blanks in a historical narrative with knowledge-based imagination. Knowing this, we chose a simulation exercise as a resource for our data collection. In this exercise, participants were encouraged to put themselves into a predecessor's position.

Simulation Exercise

The simulation exercise was based on the events of the Finnish Civil War in 1918. Before the simulation exercise, the backgrounds of the Finnish Civil War were discussed with the students who participated in our study. Students were already familiar with the subject because they had studied it in comprehensive school. The subject was also thoroughly investigated in the preparatory content lessons before the simulation. After hearing the background information about the Civil War, students were allowed to familiarize themselves more closely with the context of the simulation, namely the small town of Huittinen, located in southern Finland, and how the political conflict at the national level was reflected at the local level. Huittinen faced the same problems as Finland on the whole: a shortage of food, armaments and violent action. In the preparatory lesson, the events of

Huittinen were studied through the lives of local people. By doing this, we tried to shed light on the backgrounds and motives of the Huittinen townspeople to students and tried to get students to understand the way people thought at that time. This laid the ground for taking roles in the simulation.

The simulation exercise we used was developed by Jukka Rantala and is based on the research of Professor Risto Alapuro about the social groups in Huittinen and their reactions towards the national-level phenomena (see Rantala, 1995; Alapuro, 1994). Before beginning, each student was allocated a role that was based on actual individuals who lived in the area at that time. The participants familiarized themselves with the backgrounds of the characters and tried to absorb their social attitudes. After this, we moved to the first phase of the simulation. The participants took part in a parish meeting where the problems and tensions that led to the break out of the Civil War were discussed. The first simulation phase took approximately 20 minutes. After the parish meeting students were told about the growing political tension in Huittinen. Before the next lesson, each student had to decide whether he or she would take the 'White' or the 'Red' side.¹

At the beginning of the second lesson students were told about the events in Huittinen when the war broke out and the cruelties inflicted by the Red side. The second phase of the simulation took place at the end of the Civil War in a situation where the 'Whites' were convicting the 'Reds' who had just lost the war. According to their role, the students divided into prisoners and members of the court. The 'Reds' were told the reasons for being charged, the information being based on people's real-life actions taken during the Civil War. After this, the 'Reds' were removed from the classroom to prepare their pleas. The 'Whites' that stayed in the classroom had to consider how they would punish the members of the beaten side. The simulation ended with a court session where 'Whites' convicted the 'Reds'. In the end, students were told what kind of sentences their characters received in real life and how they ended up with severer punishments than the students did in the simulation.

Method

Participants

The simulation part of the study was put into practice in a high school in Helsinki in March 2014 with two 75-minute history classes. Not all the 27 participants of the simulation wished to take part in a post-simulation interview. The interviews were carried out during students' free time. We aimed to compensate this loss of their free time by giving them a small gift token to a department store. Nevertheless, five students refused to come to an interview and therefore they are not part of this study. Thus 22 high school students participated in our study. There were 10 female and 12 male 16–17-year-old students in this group. We did not find any differences in historical empathy between male and female students. Therefore gender has not been used as an analytic category in the study.

Before the implementation of the simulation exercise, we enquired into students' experiences of learning about historical empathy by means of simulation exercises. We found such experiences were scarce. In the pre-simulation survey, we used five-point Likert scale for measuring students' perceptions about the historical agency and the cruelties of the Civil War in Finland. With the survey we also measured the significance of history for students and how well they believed to master the content knowledge of the war. On average the students estimated in the pre-simulation survey that they had a good knowledge of the Civil War. None of the students thought that they had a poor level of knowledge, but two students estimated that they had an excellent knowledge of the conflict. Most students had very good grades from their history courses, the average grade being over 9 (on a scale from 4 to 10, 10 being the highest possible grade). This suggests that most of the students taking part in the study were motivated in their history studies.

Data Sources

Experiences of the participants were analysed using various methods. Students answered in the survey in a lesson that followed the simulation. With a help of that survey, we had a chance to compare their conceptions of the Civil War and their understanding of the nature of historical knowledge with their answers in the pre-simulation survey. The survey also examined students' experiences of simulations. Students were interviewed individually during the following weeks after the simulation. With the help of the interviews, we tried to find out the level of their historical empathy. The simulation was also videotaped. The video recordings helped us to analyse how well the students were able to relate to their characters in the simulation. This was not to assess their degree of historical empathy, but a way to check if all the students had taken the exercise seriously. More data were also obtained from the exam at the end of the course. The course exam included an essay task that measured the students' mastery of historical context.

Table 1. Process of the study

Lesson	Evaluation tool	Object of evaluation
Preparatory content lesson	Pre-simulation survey	Understanding about the nature of historical knowledge Mastery of content knowledge
Lesson 1 and 2 (simulation)	Video recording	Taking the simulation seriously
Lesson 3	Post-simulation survey	Understanding about the nature of historical knowledge Mastery of content knowledge
	Interviews	Mastery of historical empathy
Lesson 4	Essay	Mastery of historical context

Analysis

We analysed the students' historical empathy holistically using interviews and essays written by the students. In the interviews and the essays we focused on how familiar the students were with the historical context, but also how well the students understood the different perspectives related to the historical events and the relationship between the past and the present.

The previous studies have showed the connection between historical content knowledge and historical empathy (e.g. Davis Jr., 2001; Foster, 2001; Nokes, 2013, p. 125–126). Without a sufficient amount of content knowledge the students were not able to connect with their characters in the empathy exercises and their historical empathy skills remained lacking. Because many of the students in our study had problems with historical empathy, we looked into the level of their historical content knowledge.

One of the key factors in measuring the students' level of the content knowledge was the choosing of sides in the simulation. The students were not guided in their choice in any way. Hence, the choice whether they sided with the 'Reds' or the 'Whites' was to be made based on the information given to them about their characters. In the Finnish Civil War, this choice was clear to some people belonging to certain professions or maintaining a certain social status, whereas for others the choice was not so easy. In the simulation, we had characters from both groups. For most students, the choice was clear. The students had to justify their choice in a parish meeting that was part of the simulation or at the latest when the conflict turned into a war. None of the students made a choice that would have been historically unbelievable. In this respect, all the students had good basic knowledge of the war.

We also analysed the students' level of historical content knowledge with the help of an essay that the students wrote as part of their final exam. The instructions for the essay were the following: 'Reflect on the different factors that influenced the choosing of sides when the risk of the Civil War was increasing. Reflect too on the reasons why both parties in the war engaged in

widespread violent terror'. The students received a grade from the essay and that affected their course grade. Thus the students took the task seriously. When assessing the essay answers, we paid special attention to two things: how the students explained what side they chose and how they explained the participants' commitment to terror. To get an excellent grade, it was required to express at least two or more motives for choosing a side in the case of both the 'Reds' and the 'Whites'. Students also had to give several explanations for the executions and other cruelties from both sides. In the analysis, we examined students' mastery of context knowledge and the logic of their answers. To get an excellent grade, we required students to be thoroughly aware of the political and social situation before the Civil War and to analyse cause–consequence relations. If students just listed disconnected causes in a muddled order, they could not be given higher grades. Moreover, the grade would be lower if there were factual mistakes, like explaining that the infighting between the estates led to the Civil War. On the other hand, minor mistakes, such as referring to Russia as Soviet-Russia or the Soviet Union did not lower the students' scores because such information did not have an impact on their argumentation.

Because in some cases we did not obtain enough data from the interviews to analyse the empathy levels of the students, we also used the essays to give us enough material to analyse the students' empathy levels. For example, after the interview we hesitated about which category of empathy, generalized stereotypes or everyday empathy, would best describe Pekka's mindset. The interview with Pekka² showed that his thinking had some minor traits even from the 'divi' past. On the other hand, his essay had features that backed his categorization as Everyday empathy. In his essay, Pekka at the same time analysed the division of the Huittinen residents into 'Reds' and 'Whites' in a way that seemed to prove that he was able to abandon stereotypical interpretations. Pekka highlighted that not all Socialists sympathized with the 'Reds' or took part in the revolt. He emphasized that some individuals from both sides committed cruelties. According to Pekka, the actions of these individuals do not justify stigmatizing either one side or the other. In his essay, Pekka stressed that there were extremists on both sides. These extremists committed cruelties and their actions entailed retaliatory measures. He explained the brutalities committed by the 'Reds' at the end of the war as a kind of fatalism connected to the impending defeat. In the interview, this side of Pekka's thinking had not come up. Pekka's interpretation of the causes behind the events had stereotypical touches in the interview: he stressed the 'cruelty of the era'. Unlike his essay, Pekka did not pay much attention to individual actors in the interview but described the 'Reds' and 'Whites' as homogenous groups. Pekka's essay supplements the information we had about his approaches and helped us to place him in the right category of historical empathy.

We use Ashby and Lee's (1987) model only as a suggestive framework of our analysis. The purpose of the model is to help us to determine how well the students achieve the objectives that have been set for the mastery of empathy. In Finland, the common objective of comprehensive school is that 'students will know how to place themselves in the position of a person from the past: they will know how to explain why people of different eras thought and acted in different ways' and 'students will learn to explain the purposes and effects of human activity' (National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2004.) To fulfil those objectives, students' should reach the two highest levels in Ashby and Lee's model.

We studied the concurrent use of historical contextualization, perspective taking, and affective connection (see Endacott and Brooks, 2013). In taking someone else's perspective, we especially assessed how the student could explain the acts of his or her role character before and after the Civil War. We evaluated in particular the affective connection with how students could explain the verdicts of the 'Reds' convincingly.

Coding occurred holistically. Some of the interviews could be placed at different levels of Ashby and Lee's model. In those cases, analysing students' essay answers helped us to place them at the correct empathy levels. These borderline cases appeared between levels 2 and 3. The interviews and essay answers of students who we placed at the two highest levels clearly differed

from the answers of the students whom we placed at the lower levels. This was crucial to our study, because only the students who reached the two highest levels were considered to have achieved the required objectives of the history teaching.

Results

Students' Incoming Conceptions of History

Before the simulation exercise, we examined students' understanding of the nature of historical knowledge and their conceptions of the Finnish Civil War. The conceptions of the participants in our study were quite similar to the answers of 900 Finnish adolescents in the Youth and History study (see Angvik and von Borries, 1997). Participants' conceptions about history – for example the significance of an ordinary person – were consistent. It seems that in both studies Finnish adolescents do not believe that an ordinary person has significance as a historical actor and as an agent of change. Even though the data of these two studies were collected at different times, it would seem that our participants' conceptions of history could be generalized widely to Finnish adolescents.

However, concerning their attitudes towards history studies, our participants differed from the adolescents in the previous research. Students who participated in our study had more a positive attitude towards history and studying it than Finnish adolescents in the previous study. This is probably explained by their backgrounds: the Finnish high school where our research was conducted is among the top schools in Finland based on the results of the Finnish Matriculation Examination. Only the best students who have completed comprehensive school can go there. It is reasonable to say that students who participated in our study have a better history knowledge and motivation than Finnish students on average.

Difficulties in Engaging in Simulation

The answers to the post-simulation survey showed that some students had found it difficult to adopt their roles. With two students, this was mostly caused by lack of motivation: it was evident from the video recording that the students did not focus on their characters but were more concerned with discussing things unrelated to the exercise.

The lack of motivation of these two students clearly came up in the interviews made after the simulation. Hanna reported that she was not interested in the issue and therefore missed the motivation to empathize with her historical character. Tiina described how she oriented to other objects of interest as follows: 'There were some disturbances. We had our mobile phones and somehow I lost the idea of the whole simulation. I didn't concentrate'.

For three students stepping into the shoes of their role characters, however, was easy. They mentioned in the interviews that they had previous experience of this type of exercise because of their acting hobby. On average, the students did not think that it was difficult to play their roles, but they did not think that it was easy either. This was also apparent in the answers of the students when they were asked to evaluate how well they had been able to take on their roles.

Levels of Student Historical Empathy

In what follows, we analyse students that, in our opinion, did not reach the objectives of historical empathy (levels 1–3). We then concentrate on those students who we consider reached the goals (levels 4–5).

1) The 'divi' past: Perceiving the past as dark and unknowable. One student, Hanna had great difficulties in stepping into her role character's shoes. She found the simulation exercise distressing, which partly explains her reactions.

PI: Did you think that your difficulties with empathizing was because it was hard to identify with those thoughts or was it the exercise that made it difficult?

Hanna: I'm not interested in this topic so much that I would want to relate [...] I don't want to. And this is distressing; I don't know how to do this.

In the essay that was part of the final exam of the course Hanna did not analyse the intentions of the participants and did not attempt to explain the violent actions of 'Reds' and 'Whites'. This suggests that she lacked historical knowledge, which partly explains her difficulty in empathizing with past events. Hanna's essay was unorganized and it included many anachronisms which indicate that her mastery of the Civil War context was weak. Hanna did not see the people of the past as having an active role in historical events. She considered the events as taking place without individuals having any part in them. In her role as the wife of a café owner, Hanna did not see that she could have affected the course of events in any way. Hanna described the post-war executions in Huittinen in a rather detached manner without relating to the position of the people.

PI: Can you explain why the convictions were so much severe in real life compared with those given in the simulation?

Hanna: It was just easier to kill the 'Reds' [than imprison them].

PI: Hmmm...

Hanna: ...if someone had 'a Red background', probably he has always had that and he would always be like that. So off you go...

PI: So you thought that this was a way to get rid of Communism?

Hanna: It was easier to control people when those who supported wrong cause were eliminated.

According to Hanna, the 'Whites' acted foolishly when they failed to uproot the elements of a potential future revolt. In the interview, she wondered why the 'Whites' did not execute all the rebels in order to prevent future problems.

Hanna didn't in any way show an adequate mastery of historical empathy. In this case defining the empathy level was, however, challenging because she refused to fully participate in the simulation exercise. In the interview, she let us know that she was not interested in the fates of ordinary people because 'they actually don't do anything in history'.

2) Generalized stereotypes: Using stereotypes to explain the past. Along with Hanna, Liisa showed that she was not motivated to participate in the simulation exercise. Although Liisa proved in her essay that she could master the context of the simulation, she evaluated the cruelties of the participants in a generalized way. Generalizing stereotypes can be seen in her speculation about the expression 'brothers at war' that was used in the Civil War.

According to Liisa, many of the complaints filed against the 'Reds' were not 'very bad things'. Nevertheless she explained the sentences in a stereotypical way, bypassing the case-by-case analyses.

PI: Could you explain why the convictions were so severe?

Liisa: I don't know. I think the 'Whites' wanted to show that they were in power. In a way it is natural that when someone is annoyed, he wants to rise in revolt. That's just the way human nature is. In the Civil War, when all the dissatisfied people joined together, that is the reason why the actions were so radical.

PI: I see, okay.

Liisa: Like the expression 'brothers at war' suggests, in everyday life you fight hardest with your siblings.

Like Liisa, Janne also projected his attitudes onto the past. In the simulation, Janne played the role of one of the richest merchants in the area. During the war, the 'Reds' confiscated his property and the merchant had to flee into the woods, so he had a reason to feel bitterness towards the 'Reds'. In spite of this, Janne had a neutral attitude towards the 'Reds' and he attempted to give just sentences by contemporary standards.

Six students responded like Liisa and Janne. In the interviews carried out after the simulation the past was judged in terms of the present. Comments like 'The era was crude' and 'the confrontation was stupid' reoccurred in the interviews of the students. Sauli crystalized a standpoint shared by many students when he valued the present as better than the past.

PI: Did you learn anything new with the simulation?

Sauli: I learned that the punishments were much harsher than I expected.

PI: Do you have an impression that you understand some things better through this exercise?

Sauli: Yeah, at least things seem to be better nowadays than they were in the past.

The students explained the division into the 'Reds' and 'Whites' and the cruelties done by both sides in a stereotypical manner. In some cases, it was challenging to decide which one of the empathy categories, Generalized stereotypes or Everyday empathy, would be the most descriptive and precise one. The difficulties arose from the remark that in many cases the students thought patterns had features from both categories. For example, Janne explained that the 'Whites' treated the 'Reds' harshly after the war on account of the insecure feeling the 'Whites' would have had if the 'Reds' had simply been released. He also gave financial reasons for the executions: it was cheaper for the 'Whites' to execute the 'Reds' rather than keep them in prison camps. In reality many rebels were able to avoid imprisonment because their labour input was needed by landowners. The 'Whites' actually had such a strong position after the Civil War that they did not have to worry about the revenge of the 'Reds'. On the other hand, there is no evidence that the verdicts given by the 'Whites' would have been based on financial factors. Even though we saw some features of Everyday empathy in Janne's thinking, we ended up placing him in Generalized stereotypes because his notions had stronger concord with that category.

3) Everyday empathy: Applying everyday empathy to past events. Seven students showed that they were familiar with the Civil War and its background but they projected modern explanations onto the cruelties of the past. These explanations were not stereotypical in the same way as those given by the students mentioned earlier. Some of these students, however, had notions typical of lower empathy levels. For example, Pekka, who is cited below, had thoughts that were typical of the 'divi' past:

PI: Do you think it was justified that you established armed forces?

Pekka: I think that those who started to acquire weapons were stupid.

The interview, however, showed that Pekka's thinking, contrary to Janne, had many elements that could be placed at the level of Everyday empathy. Because of this, we decided to categorize Pekka as that level.

Pekka, along with six other students, did not take into account that the conditions of democracy were exceptional because of the war. Instead they saw the actions and fate of their personages in terms of a peacetime society. They thought that it was wrong to give such harsh sentences to fellow citizens. This kind of thinking style could be seen from Mikko's interview:

PI: What kind of judgment did you get in the simulation?

Mikko: I was sentenced to death, which I considered unfair since at the time Finland was a democracy and I was just defending my cause.

PI: How did you defend yourself?

Mikko: I admitted everything and didn't regret anything...I felt that I had not done anything wrong.

Also the convictions imposed on the 'Reds' were criticized from the standpoint of the present.

PI: Execution is a kind of conclusive solution...

Mikko: It was not fair that they condemned their own citizens to death.

[...]

Mikko: In Europe, we don't use the death penalty anymore. And in Finland life imprisonment means only 12 years in jail. Therefore the executions in the Civil War were too harsh measures.

4) Restricted historical empathy. We categorized three students into the second highest level of Ashby and Lee's model. These students showed an aspiration to understand the behaviour of the residents of Huittinen by taking account of their social positions and intentions. On the other hand, the students seemed to have limited ability to integrate the situation into the wider background of the era. However in view of our study, they seemed to have reached the objectives of studying historical empathy.

In the simulation, Pasi was very attached to the great narrative of Finnish history, according to which Finnish people tried to gain independence from Russia between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. This partly hindered his simulation. According to Pasi, it made no sense that the 'Reds' and the 'Whites' fought each other when they could have joined forces against the Russians. Pasi's attitude was understandable in the pre-Civil War context but not when the conflict formed into a full-fledged war. In the simulation, Pasi avoided giving harsh sentences to the 'Reds' as that would have deepened the divide between the 'Reds' and the 'Whites'. From a certain point of view Pasi's actions are understandable but he was also partly unable to analyse the reasons for the conflict on a deeper level. In the interview after the simulation, Pasi explained the executions ordered by the 'Whites' as 'vengeful mistakes', which reveals that he kept to the idea of national unification. However, was able to link his explanations to a larger context. He also showed that he understood the need for revenge and the reasons behind it, as one can notice from the citation below:

Pasi: There [at the village of Huittinen] were some skirmishes before the war and during the war it was the scene of fierce fighting. Surely the tensions between the parties were serious. I can very well understand that if there were people who were easy to blame for the incidents, these people were judged excessively harshly. Humans are just humans and prone to make mistakes with their reprisals. [...] A man wants to revenge if his or her next of kin has been attacked.

PI: It's like the code of Hammurabi...

Pasi: Exactly.

Petteri proved that he had an ability to examine the situation from the standpoints of past-time actors. He explained the harsh judgements given by the 'Whites' by their efforts to uproot Communism from Finnish society. Petteri's explanation is partly true. On the other hand, his explanation lacks the affective connection between the incidents and the later spiral of revenge which often originated from non-ideological causes.

Like Petteri, Tomi tries to explain the convictions given by the 'Whites' by referring to their values, goals and experiences. However, like his peer group, he is unable to connect accurately enough the occasion with the general background of the period in question. The same problem can be noticed with students' assessment of the spiral of revenge which started before the arming of the two sides. Tomi explains the incident quite one-sidedly as the bitterness the 'Whites' felt after the 'Reds' had resorted to violence. He doesn't pay any attention to the brutalities committed by the 'Reds' and the impact of that on the judgements.

Tomi: Sooner or later one or the other establishes armed forces, so you have to try to be the first one to act. In the end, we 'Reds' were punished for that.

PI: In hindsight, was the conviction [execution] given to the character in real life fair?

Max: Of course, the accused always says that he has not deserved the conviction.

Nevertheless, bitterness was the thing [that provoked the 'Whites' to give harsh punishments]. The 'Whites' were embittered [about the arming of the 'Reds'] even though they armed themselves similarly.

5) Contextual historical empathy. We interpreted that three students showed signs of contextual historical empathy. Helmi showed an excellent mastery of historical events both in the interview and in her essay. She speculated about the reasons behind violence towards fellow humans in larger contexts. She also used historical analogies, such as the civil war in Syria, in explaining the cruelties that took place in the Finnish Civil War. Helmi, Esko and Ari described the hatred and bitterness typical of civil wars, which eventually led to extreme actions in Finland. However, they understood that from our modern perspective it is impossible to fully grasp the emotional reasons behind the executions. They explained the sentences given in the simulation as having a rational basis, thus differing from the historical sentences that stemmed from more personal, emotional motives.

PI: Can you explain why the convictions in real life were harsher than those in the simulation?

Helmi: We don't have personal contact with the Civil War. We gave milder verdicts for the 'Reds' because we didn't find this issue close to us. Those sentences given in the village of Huittinen, they had a lot of emotions and trauma behind them. [...] There was bitterness about the injustice done by the 'Reds' to your family or friends. It is hard for us try to put our soul into the historical characters because we haven't personally experienced injustice directed at us. Therefore, we gave the verdict for the 'Reds' on quite a rational basis.

PI: So you explain the judgment as the result of deep-rooted hatred...

Helmi: Yes. I don't think that people have advanced to behave less violently through evolution. I think we are nowadays the same. There must have been a strong element of something emotional.

Helmi describes human nature as unchanging in its deepest essence. She does not consider that a modern man would act differently in a situation analogous to the occurrences in Huittinen. She justifies her opinion by analogy with the Syrian Civil war. A modern man would by the same token be ready for reprisal if his personal losses and other circumstances were the same as in the Finnish Civil War. 'It's not so that one generation would suddenly be exceptionally violent. Instead we humans are similar'.

Students' actions during the simulation and the interviews conducted after the simulation reveal that many students project modern-day thinking and current attitudes to past events. Some students also have a tendency to act as judges of historic events, so that instead of empathizing they moralize. Being able to relate to the emotions and actions of people from the past is not an easy task, especially when it comes to understanding extreme actions. This became obvious when interviewing the students after the simulation. We compared the students' actions in the simulation with the real events and discovered that only those three students were able to compare their actions with the historical background in a way that expressed contextual historical empathy. These three students proved their ability to apply historical contextualization, perspective taking and affective connection in their interviews and essay-answers.

This lack of historical empathy is not due to the students being unfamiliar with the historical context but rather the ability to link the knowledge of historical events to the actions of individuals. We will return to this question at the end of the article.

Evidence of Student Growth

The aim of the pre-simulation survey was to find out how the students felt about historical knowledge. The students' answers revealed that they saw history as a monolithic story, which was traditionally the aim of history teaching in Finland as teaching previously focused on the great national narrative. Attitudes of this kind occurred, for example, in the student's way of thinking that wars and leaders have had a much more significant role in the formation of history than ordinary people. Within the five-point Likert scale (1=very little and 5=very much) students believed that wars ($M = 4.0$) as well as state leaders ($M = 4.04$) have influenced people's lives much or very

much. They considered that ordinary people only had some influence on history ($M = 2.95$). Additionally, the students reported that they were above all interested in the macrohistorical aspects of the Finnish Civil War rather than in the fates of ordinary people. However, in the interviews conducted after the simulation this black and white way of perceiving history was replaced to some extent by a multiperspective way of examining it. The students said that they had reflected on the developments leading to the Civil War from different perspectives and that they had also considered the motives of both sides of the war. This is visible in Pekka's comment:

PI: In the simulation, did you learn something new that you had not previously known or understood?

Pekka: [Before the simulation] you only think about the Civil War from a certain perspective. And now when I was on the side of the 'Reds' I can see another side to the story as well. It kind of opened up new perspectives.

In order to break free from their own mindsets of modern society, the students had to have enough time to familiarize themselves with their role characters and the historical background (cf. Endacott, 2014). By the first phase of the simulation, many students had difficulties in freeing themselves from present-day mindsets and to putting themselves into their roles. Within the simulation, an increasing number of students were able to leave behind their present-day mindsets. The time use in our simulation differed from the tests used by the Finnish National Board of Education in 2011 in which the students were asked to demonstrate historical empathy after reading a short introductory text. In the simulation, the students had more time to familiarize themselves with the historical actors and thus the simulation allowed them to step into the mental mindsets of the time. As Pasi described it: 'You could somehow get inside their heads.'

One clear advantage of the simulation was that it took part in a group. The students supported each other in empathizing with their roles. This can be noticed amongst other things in the interview with Teo:

Teo: First I thought that the participants might distance themselves from their roles by saying: 'My characterization thinks in this way, but I don't agree with that.' Surprisingly, nobody acted like that: instead everybody acted through his or her role. From this standpoint, the simulation was successful.

The supporting role of the peer group can be detected even in the traversal of the simulation. Discussion in a group is generally more thought-provoking than individual ponderings (see Brooks, 2008). Communication about the experiences with the peer group in the simulation brings additional value, which is missing from traditional written exercises.

Our appraisal of the suitability of the simulation for teaching historical empathy was based on the feedback we collected from students. According to the students, the simulation helped them to understand the choices that different individuals made in the past. This was inquired using a five-point Likert scale (1 = poorly and 5 = well). Half of the respondents chose either value 4 or 5. The mean was 3.28. The simulation also made the war feel more real to the students. This could be seen from the survey we did before and after the simulation. In the survey that was done after the simulation the students perceived the historical period that led to the war as more contentious and warlike than before the simulation. The students' attitudes had especially been changed in how they perceived the societal development at the time. Before the simulation, half of the students considered that the general attitude in Finland at the time leaned towards a peaceful solution to the conflict. After the simulation, only a few students thought in this way. This change in the attitudes of the students might be explained by the way the students had to familiarize themselves with the topic in the simulation exercise. When they had to step into the shoes of their character and analyse the social evils of that time, the juxtaposition of the two sides became clearer and more concrete than if they had only studied this in a textbook. The idea that the participants of the conflict were ready to defend themselves even by using violent measures was made concrete by the simulation.

This changed the students' perceptions on how deep the divide between the participants in the war was at the time. This change can be seen when comparing the before and after surveys.

The following table presents the mean scores of paired adjective scales before and after the simulation. Students were asked to consider the period in Finland before the outbreak of the Civil War and select from paired adjective scales which might aptly describe this period. The table demonstrates that students' feelings about the period changed to the extent that they considered it to be more contentious, warlike, risky, fearful and threatening.

Table 2. Comparison of pre- and post-simulation survey by paired adjective scales

	Pre-simulation	Post-simulation	Difference
Cooperative (1) – Contentious (5)	3.32	3.84	0.52
Friendly (1) – Hostile (5)	3.40	3.40	0
Benign (1) – Threatening (5)	3.48	3.68	0.20
Predictable (1) – Risky (5)	3.12	3.36	0.24
Peaceful (1) – Warlike (5)	3.16	3.44	0.28
Calm (1) – Fearful (5)	3.24	3.48	0.24
Safe (1) – Dangerous (5)	3.64	3.64	0

Assuming the role of a historical character made the students ponder on the decisions the character had made or the feelings that were possibly related to that situation. However, for some students the exercise remained superficial due to a lack of knowledge or motivation. According to the students, they had only participated a few times in similar exercises during their school years as the studying of history had been focused on learning historical contents from a textbook (cf. Beck *et al.*, 1995, p. 224; Brit *et al.*, 2000). Even though the students had read in their textbooks about the thousands of lives lost during the Civil War, this was the first time the students were able to really understand this in a concrete manner. This made the students look at history through the eyes of real historical actors.

Contextual historical empathy requires a good command of the context as well as the ability to empathize with others. Many of the students participating in the simulation exercise had a good macrolevel understanding about the conflict. They were able to give universally applicable explanations for the reasons leading up to the war as well as the horrendous acts committed during the war. However, what was problematic for them was perceiving these events on a concrete individual level. This could be seen from the way the students projected modern-day thinking patterns on the decisions made by their characters during the simulation and in the post-simulation interviews. In addition, when discussing the executions the students explained them from a structural point of view, not from an individual perspective. For example, one of the explanations the students gave for the executions was getting rid of Communism.

Discussion

When evaluating the reliability of this study we need to consider the small size of our study population. As only a small number of students studying in one of the highest ranked high schools in Finland showed contextual historical empathy even with very good grades from their history studies, it is clear that 15-year-old students studying in the final level of the comprehensive school will not do better when it comes to historical empathy. Thus, it seems that the goals set in the curriculum regarding historical empathy are not met in history teaching in comprehensive school.

What is of the essence when evaluating our results is how credible our estimation of the students' level of historical empathy is. The students' lack of knowledge of the historical background related to the simulation or the students' nervousness about the exercise could both have affected the results. This is why we measured the students' historical knowledge and asked them for feedback about how they experienced the simulation.

The lack of historical empathy visible in most students' performance could have been explained by the students not having enough information about their characters or by the students not having enough time to familiarize themselves with the characters. This was, however, in our opinion avoided by giving the students the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the character before the simulation and they were also able to practise their roles in the parish meeting, which was part of the simulation. The students also said that they had received enough information about their characters.

It can still be asked if the students were motivated enough to learn the background of the Civil War in Huittinen before the simulation exercise. They might have been more motivated to learn the context and the specific details of actual people after they experienced the dilemma personally. Organizing the study that way we might have deepened the debriefing of the simulation and thus achieved a better understanding about students' mastery of historical empathy. Also the results might have been better.

Another reason behind the lack of historical empathy might have been the students experiencing 'stage fright', which could have hindered their performance. One of the students partly rejected the whole exercise, which can largely be explained by feeling nervous about the simulation. However, in the feedback collected after the simulation most students felt that the exercise had been successful both on an individual and on a group level. Apart from two individuals, the students said that they had enjoyed the exercise. In conclusion, we doubt that the weak results of the students can be explained by the students feeling nervous about the simulation or the students not liking the exercise.

One can also question whether the interviews gave us enough information to define the levels of historical empathy. However, several different methods were used in our analysis: in addition to the interviews we collected data with surveys and essays. Based on data triangulation our analysis can be considered credible. However, no large generalizations can be made as our students can be seen as representing the best in their age group when it comes to academic success. Our aim, on the other hand, was not to get results that can be applicable to all high school students in Finland but rather to question whether the goals set for history teaching in comprehensive schools are reached.

We analysed the students' empathy levels using the classification by Ashby and Lee (1987). Of 22 students, only six were placed in the two highest levels. This can be considered surprising when we think from the viewpoint of the aims of history teaching. For 15 years the teaching of historical empathy should have been a relevant part of history teaching in comprehensive school (see Rantala, 2012). The results of this should be visible in today's high school students if teachers abided by the core curriculum. In Finland, the National Board of Education formulates binding core curriculum at the national level but teachers have responsibility for deciding the curricular content on the basis of provided guidelines (Mølstad, 2015). As Finland has no school inspection or national testing at the comprehensive level, teachers have the freedom to plan how to cover the curriculum. In the light of our study, however, it seems that teachers have not taught historical empathy in the way that the core curriculum requires.

One possible explanation for these low scores is that the students did not have experience in looking at historical events through individuals and their actions. The authoritative source of information for the students has been the textbook, which aims at objectivity at the cost of focusing on actual actors at the time (see Beck *et al.*, 1995, p. 224). The macrolevel explanations and the metanarratives had become the main way for the students to explain historical events. This is also visible in earlier studies that show that Finnish adolescents tend to perceive history through societal constructions and movements rather than through individual actors (see Ahonen 1997).

Previous studies (see e.g. von Borries and Baeck, 1998; Ouakrim-Soivio and Kuusela, 2012; Rantala, 2012; Rantala and van den Berg, 2013) show that the emphasis of history teaching has been on learning content rather than historical thinking skills. They also reveal that the textbook has

been the most valuable source of information (Ouakrim-Soivio and Kuusela, 2012, p. 35, 37). When the textbooks are for the most part based on metanarratives (see Gullberg, 2010), the students lack multiperspective ways of analysing history. In order to reach contextual historical empathy the student needs to be able to have a good command of historical literacy, which means that the student can analyse different historical texts (VanSledright and Kelly, 1998). The different historical texts create cognitive dissonance in the students, which in turn makes them look at historical information from multiple perspectives. For the students in our study, a simulation exercise was not a typical way of learning history, nor were they attuned to using texts of a different kind in their studies, and this might explain the poor results. Whereas in the simulations the students learned to see history from many perspectives, they tended to bind their explanations in their essays to the metanarratives generally found in textbooks. Yeager, Foster and Maley (1998) noticed that using different sources supported the development of historical empathy. For this reason other sources besides the textbook should be used more in history teaching.

While reflecting on simulation as a method of teaching historical empathy, Janne highlighted the problems of textbook-based history teaching. He pointed out the need to have a more multiperspective view on history by using fictional texts along with traditional history books.

Janne: Fictional books give so much more than reading the information from a textbook. In fiction, the different attitudes and opinions are allowed and they are also visible [...], so that in principle it's biased but you are also aware of that.

A multiperspective view on historical phenomenon characterizes simulations. Even though the students' attitudes toward using simulations in teaching were mostly positive, they were worried about the effectiveness of this kind of learning. Teo verbalized this worry: 'Is the understanding about the historical phenomenon deepened so much that the time invested in these kinds of exercises is justified?' It can be assumed that these kinds of questions are also in the minds of teachers who teach the traditional historical canon (cf. VanSledright, 2002, p. 105).

Besides the monolithic narrative afforded by textbooks' the teaching of historical empathy is impeded by teachers' attempts to cover multiple content standards superficially. In Finnish high school, very few historical phenomena can be studied in depth. There are nearly 70 core content elements in the compulsory courses and only twice as much lessons to teach them. From 2016 onwards, the ratio of core content elements to lessons stays constant. In the comprehensive school, however, history teaching will have a greater emphasis on the development of historical thinking and teachers will have only 11 core content elements to teach during four years time. Thus they can dig into a topic of their own choice and stay there for a while. It will enable students' ability to empathize with specific people or events. Yet, teachers have to be poised to leave behind the content-based tradition and ready to teach history in depth.

Our study supports the results received from previous studies about history teaching in Finland. So far, Finnish teachers have not changed their teaching methods despite the changes in the curriculum. It takes time to adapt to new methods in history teaching, as international examples have shown us (see Counsell, 2011). The previous curricula demanded going through large amounts of historical contents have made the teachers prefer the traditional teacher-led methods instead of the time-consuming skill-oriented exercises.

In 2016 new core curricula will be adopted in both the Finnish comprehensive school and high school. In the new core curriculum for comprehensive schools, the contents will be reduced in order to have more time to teach different types of historical thinking skills. Having said that, the structures of the Finnish high school system can cause challenges of a different kind for this kind of learning. Teaching in Finnish high schools is still strongly directed towards the Matriculation Examination and success in this exam is still very important to individual students as well as to the reputation of a school. As long as success in Matriculation Examination is based mostly on the memorization of content-based information rather than historical skills the teaching of historical empathy is in danger of remaining a minor footnote. Fortunately, the reform of history tests in the

Matriculation Examination is currently ongoing and is moving in a more skill-based direction. There is also new research-based evidence that Finnish history teachers consider historical empathy to be one of the main focuses in their teaching (Ouakrim-Soivio and Kuusela, 2012). So there seems to be a promising future for the teaching of historical empathy – especially if teachers are supported with suitable new teaching materials.

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¹ The 'Reds' were popular especially among the working population and the poor in rural areas, and the 'Whites' represented mainly the bourgeoisie and freeholders.

² A pseudonym, as are all the identifying names that follow.